

BETHESDA

By BOB STEWART



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Writer's Guild Of America East.

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WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... This play isn't going to be for everyone, but if you can stomach it, it's extraordinary. I'm not one for trigger warnings, and c'mon, 'if you're reading Fleas on the Dog, you've gotta have some thick skins, so I'll just let you take off the kid gloves and read at your own risk. The soldiers in this story have been through hell. They speak of unspeakable things. They use unspeakable language. They are both damned and damaged. Their mothers are left to reconcile themselves with their son's traumas as well as their own – and we're along for the ride. The play hits a level of outrage and outrageousness that could cause a laughing fit at a funeral. For all its aspirations to show the human condition, modern theatre is in danger of tilting into the PC and the palatable. Not this! Fuck that noise. One wishes the language and situations in this drama were merely relegated to*

the stage and less tolerated off of it. That said, a production of this play needs to be handled with care. One false step, and the whole thing could explode, and we're talking IED's, PTSD, the whole bit. Therapy not included.

Five stars.

GEORGE

(Celebrating) Friggin' crazy-

BARRY

(Celebrating) Crazy!

GEORGE

(Excited) And we are great! *(Delight-HE convinced BARRY.)* We're in fucking Bethesda, man! I think in the bible, even Jesus did some good shit in Bethesda! So, we are great!

BARRY

(More Excited) Who-Ya!!!

((Spacing and format is playwright's own.))

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SETTING: A hospital room in Bethesda Navel Hospital. Now.

CHARACTERS:

GEORGE: 22-year-old. Marine Lance Corporal. Angry, uneducated, lower-class, young man from Corpus Christi, Texas. A Leader but of weak men. He has a vulgar mouth. Protective of BARRY.

BARRY: 22-year-old. Marine Lance Corporal. Uneducated, A lower-class, young man from Bozeman, Montana. He's a Follower. Sensitive but hides it with laughter and a vulgar mouth too. Adores GEORGE & looking for his approval.

GEORGE'S MOM: 50's, heavy-set, tired and full of regret. Lower-class/White Trash woman from Texas. She seems centered but it's just a deep exhaustion about her life choices. A sober drunk. Been at Bethesda Hospital for a week.

BARRY'S MOM: Mid 40's. Lower Class/White Trash woman. A Clean Addict. Dresses sexy but cheap. Deeply regretful and very emotional. Been at Bethesda Hospital for 24 hours.

(Two men lie in hospital beds that are side by side. BOTH are in THEIR very early 20's. THEY are in hospital gowns & have THEIR eyes closed. One man opens HIS eyes and peaks around. HE smiles and whispers to the man in the next bed.)

GEORGE

Barry? Barry, get up!

(BARRY opens his eyes and pushes down his covers.)

BARRY

Hey George!

GEORGE

(Sitting up) -Thought they'd never friggin' leave!

BARRY

Yeah, but it's nice that they're here.

GEORGE

Yeah, but all the time? Jeez! Now, where were we?

BARRY

I was up! OK, OK, OK! (*Excited, HE tries to remember the game*) "You're mom... sucks Satan's dick while he's... munching Lt. Nancy's muff in Hell, while-

GEORGE

Wrong, Barry!!! It's "Fallujah!" We changed "Hell" to "Fallujah," asshole! (*Laughs*)

BARRY

(*Pissed*) Fuck me-

GEORGE

I'm up! OK, (*tries to remember the game*) "Your Mom... sucks Satan's dick while he's munching Lt. Nancy's muff in Fallujah... during a Towel-Head/Faggot Pride Parade. As Jesus & Mohammad eat out each other's asses-

BARRY

(*Laughs*) Not asses, George! "Man-ginas!" We changed it to "Man-ginas." Like that faggot in Germany! (*Laughs*)

GEORGE

Damn!

BARRY

-My turn! (*Tries to remember*) "Munching Lt. Nancy's muff during a Towel-Head Faggot... (*trying to remember*)

GEORGE

Pride Parade!

BARRY

(*Defensive*) I was gonna say "Pride" George! OK... (*remembering*) "during a Faggot Pride Parade as Jesus & Mohammad eat-out each other's 'man-ginas,' while your Dad-

GEORGE

(*Laughing*) Don't got no Dad!

BARRY

Even bastards like you have a Dad! (*Pride fully tops HIM*)
–As, “your Dad shoves his cock down Satan’s throat!!!”
(*He beams w/pride.*)

GEORGE
(*Disbelieving*) That’s all you got? “My dad shoves his
cock down Satan’s throat?”

BARRY
(*Excitedly*) Yeah, but...when your Dad cums, he... grabs
Satan’s ears and says... (*excited, HE delivers the punch
line*) “Wow, you’re mouth feels just like my son, George-

GEORGE
Son of a bitch-

BARRY
Got cha- (*Laughing*)

GEORGE
(*Starts to get out of bed*) Butt-munch-

BARRY
(*Warns HIM*) Don’t get out of bed or I’ll tell the nurse!

GEORGE
(*Falling back in bed*) Bite me, double-time! (*Beat*) Damn,
I wish I had a cigarette!

BARRY
When the window’s open, I smell the nurses smoking
outside.

GEORGE
Man, I don’t know what is worse; smelling those Nurses as
they lean over me or smelling the cigarettes on their
breathe! (*Rubbing HIS crotch*) Damn, I love to get a hold of
that Mexican one-

BARRY
With the big titties?

GEORGE
Yeah! (*Demonstrates*) Spread those thighs and munch her
like some watermelon! Slurp, slurp, A-h-h-h!

BARRY
(*Laughing*) Commanding Officer would kill your ass-

GEORGE

(Defensive) Fuck him! He was fucking Lt. Nancy the whole time we were in Fallujah. Hate him & that bitch!

When I worked at Blockbuster, the manager was fucking this girl there. Then she started acting like a bitch too! Fucking disgusting!

BARRY

(Lewdly) "Fucking" is, if you do it right! *(Laughs)*

GEORGE

(Suddenly very worried) Wait, wait, wait... its nighttime, right? I get confused sometimes.

BARRY

It's got to be nighttime. Food tray is gone and so is my Kool-Aid.

GEORGE

(Relived) Yeah, yeah! It's all good. OK, where were we? OK, so... *(back to the game)* "My Dad face-fucked Satan, screaming *(mocks)* "your mouth's just like my son, George's and"-

BARRY

(Laughing) Stop! You can't top my last one. Don't even try-

GEORGE

(Trying to top it) But Satan had his... guts hanging on the outside of his body!!!

BARRY

(Shocked) No! Damn-

GEORGE

(Laughs, remembering story) Just like that Towel Head when we were under fire? He pulled up his robe and his intestines are all hanging out! *(Laughing)* I kept saying, "We'll get you a Medic," but he kept yakking! "I need a job! I just need a job!" *(Laughs)*

BARRY

(Memory sobers HIM up) That was messed up!

GEORGE

(Still laughing) MoFo just walked away. Just walked away into a sand storm with his kids!

BARRY

(Suddenly sad) I don't wanna... I don't wanna think 'bout that.

GEORGE

Ah come on! *(Tries to cheer HIM up)* Hey at least we're walking. We walked away, Barry!

BARRY

(Convincing HIMSELF to not be sad) Yeah, we walked away! Hell yeah! *(HE becomes relieved. Suddenly becomes excited.)* Hey George, how long you think we got here?

GEORGE

Gotta pass Evaluations 1st. And then, we are "gone!"

BARRY

(Gets very excited) Man, I can't wait! Once I get my VA check, I'm going to buy me a Dodge 150! And then I'm gonna take every highway Bozeman, Montana has! Then I'm going to take every dirt road & every fucking trail! Maybe drive by my Dad's trailer and see if he wants to ride shotgun. Maybe smoke a Jay with him. *(Frustrated)* That's if his girlfriend will let him!

GEORGE

(Tired of hearing this) Fuck him-

BARRY

Naw, he's cool-

GEORGE

Fucking Pussy beat you and your mom & kept leaving for Skanks-

BARRY

(Defensive) Not a Pussy!

GEORGE

Fuck he ain't! *(Convincing BARRY)* Corpus Christi had some Free Counseling shit, once. And when Child Services came down on my mom again for drinking, they sent me to a Shrink. And he said... "It was OK to call my Dad a Pussy 'cause he left!" Call my Mom a pussy too! 'Cause they're fuck-ups! Anyone who fucks up like that is a pussy!

BARRY

(Confesses) Yeah, but didn't we fuck-up...?

GEORGE

(Cutting HIM off) We are not fuck-up! We picked up all our officers, drove them to Base. Everybody survived! Officer Molloy & Koliba are two flights up!

BARRY

(Getting mad) I know it was that fuckin' kid who did it-

GEORGE

(Tired of hearing this story) No, you don't!

BARRY

-(Mocks the kid) "What's I. E. D. stand for? What I. E. D. stand for?" *(Pissed@memory)* Sand-Nigger Motherfucker!

GEORGE

(Reminding HIM) Chill! We got Mental Evaluation to pass too, fool! Molloy & Koliba promised us that we're going to have a big fucking party when we all get out! So, fucking, chill!

(BOTH kick back. BARRY gets worried.)

BARRY

(Cautiously) How come they don't talk ever about it? Officers come down, but they don't talk about it!

GEORGE

(Irritated about this topic) Molloy's hearing came back. So did Koliba's!

BARRY

But, shouldn't they be mad...?

GEORGE

(Convincing Him yet again) They come down & share their Weed and Stoli, almost every night after lights out! They ain't mad!

You want them to fucking, what? Forgive you? Like some... "Healing Like Jesus With Some Water," shit-?

BARRY

Well?

GEORGE

(Angry) No one saw it coming, Barry! Towel-Heads planted it right in their own fountain! Their only source of water for 50 fucking miles and they blew the son of a bitch up just to get us? Well, fuck them and their 72 Virgins, 'cause we all walked away! Walked away, getting out, it's all good!

(Satisfied HE proved HIS point, GEORGE kicks back. BARRY is sad. GEORGE sees this.)

GEORGE

(Getting mad) Ah Jesus, you ain't doing that "sad shit" again, are you?

BARRY

(Defensive) No-

GEORGE

'Cause I can't do that "sad shit" again-

BARRY

(Topping HIM) I'm not! I'm not!

GEORGE

(Lecturing HIM) We did our job, Barry! Shit hit the fan, OK? Officers ain't pissed, everybody's cool! So no more "sad shit!"

We are "War Heroes" man! And we don't have to take shit from nobody anymore! *(Listing)* Not my mom or her broke-ass family! Or your mom & that Meth-Head she's with-

BARRY

Hate him-

GEORGE

'Cause we are back with medals and stories, & Uncle Sam's cash! And let our families beg us for money now!

(Mocks) "You couldn't come to Base when I got shipped out, but now you want some of my Army Pay? Then get rid of that scum your living with and I'll give you some! Respect me and I'll give you some-"

BARRY

(Convinced) Hell yeah-

GEORGE

(Encouraging BARRY) Now you got it! And hey, we're not bullshit, "Chauffeurs for Officers" no more either!
(Prideful re: their new rank) We're "Marine Lance Corporal Barry" and "Lance Corporal George" now! War Heroes! Don't take shit from nobody!

BARRY

(Inspired, HE shouts) Hell yeah! Hell yeah!

GEORGE

(Topping HIM) Bet your ass!

(THEY both lie back, convinced & satisfied. Admiring GEORGE, BARRY studies HIM.)

BARRY

(Sincere but embarrassed) Hey George, um... could we hang out after we're discharged? Ain't ever had much family and shit. 'Cept a cousin who's in jail.

We were a good team driving them, so... could we hang, maybe?

GEORGE

(Charmed by the request) Every night, buddy. We'll hang every night! I promise!

(BARRY grins from ear to ear at GEORGE. GEORGE grins back. OFFSTAGE noises are heard.)

GEORGE

(Giggling getting under the cover) Uh-oh, "Mom Alert at 10 O'clock! Mom Alert!"

BARRY

(Getting under the covers, delighted) Man, I hate the way they hover! Like stink on shit-

GEORGE

(Delighted getting under his covers too) Never did that when I was little!

BARRY

Me neither! *(laughs)*

GEORGE

(Celebrating) Friggin' crazy-

BARRY

(Celebrating) Crazy!

GEORGE

(Excited) And we are great! *(Delight-HE convinced BARRY.)* We're in fucking Bethesda, man! I think in the bible, even Jesus did some good shit in Bethesda! So, we are great!

BARRY

(More Excited) Who-Ya!!!

(THEY grin with delight. THEY lie back & close their eyes.)

A Lower-Class Older, heavy-set WOMAN enters in Her 40's. SHE's exhausted. SHE goes next to GEORGE. A Lower-Class WOMAN in her 40's follows close behind & goes to BARRY'S bed. SHE has been crying & turns off HER cell phone. The Older WOMAN looks at GEORGE sleeping.)

GEORGE'S MOM

(Sadly, watches HIS face) Rapid Eye Movement.

BARRY'S MOM

(Trying to hide HER upset) Doctor says that means they're dreaming.

GEORGE'S MOM

(Sadly, studying HER son w/ disbelief) Lost half their brains. Won't ever talk, walk, feed, or clean themselves again, but... they dream.

(GEORGE'S MOM sits in the chair next to their son's bed. BARRY'S MOM reads her phone & wipes HER tears. GEORGE'S MOM watches.)

GEORGE'S MOM

So, how'd it go with your boyfriend?

BARRY'S MOM

(Upset) Told him finally to... get out! And hung up!

GEORGE'S MOM

Good girl.

BARRY'S MOM

(Convincing HERSELF) I got no future with him! Going to take my Trailer and move it closer to the hospital here! And I'm going to get another generator to help out with all the machines Barry will be needing! I need the entire back rooms for Barry now! So, I told him to "get out" & stay out!

GEORGE'S MOM

(Sadly remembers) Never had a good one, either. And all of 'em hated George. *(Turns to GEORGE)* Well... *(she beams & takes his hand)* he's a Hero now.

(BOTH are lost in pain & regret.)

BARRY'S MOM

Decided... I am going to go to Arlington for the funerals of the Officers, the boys were driving. I am.

GEORGE'S MOM

(Exhaustingly happy about this) George liked driving them.

BARRY'S MOM

(Touched) Barry did too! I'm going to bring Barry's photo with me to the funerals. I know he'd want to be there too, you know?

GEORGE'S MOM

(Touched) Would you bring George's too? Nurses and I will take care of Barry while you're gone, promise! I'll even give him sips of Kool-Aid, like you been doing.

BARRY'S MOM

(Touched by HER offer to tend to HER son) OK.

(BOTH women smile at each other in confirmation. THEY fight tears. THEY turn to their sons. GEORGE'S MOM holds HER son's hand & stares out w/exhaustion. BARRY'S MOM strokes BARRY'S face and smiles down at him like he's a baby.)

BARRY'S MOM

That's right, I'm going to take care of you Barry. I'm going to take care of you. You're my future now!

GEORGE'S MOM

(Quietly realizing) My future is my son. My future is my son. *(Sadly)* Finally.

(GEORGE'S MOM hears her last words, puts her face in her hands & quietly weeps.)

BLACKOUT

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:

I wrote BETHESDA because I became very inspired by a memory I had as an Army Brat. My father took me with him to visit the local Veteran's Hospital. I was left in a hallway as my father dealt with his business, and I overheard many wounded soldiers talking in a nearby lounge. Many were severely wounded, but they were all dealing with it with rage-filled, vulgar jokes, competition, and lots of cussing. I based BETHESDA on that memory. I also wanted to explore the idea of a modern tragedy in a short form and to comment on the social and economic issues of our modern soldiers and why they joined the military. Meanwhile, I worked into the play my fascination with the repercussions of "bad parenting" and how it effects the children and adults. I love so many modern playwrights, but I have been influenced as of late by Tony Kushner, David Mamet, and Paula Vogel's plays. Also, by Charles Beaumont and Eugene O'Neill's short, disturbing, dramas too. They constantly inspire me. I hope you enjoy BETHESDA. Even with its vulgar language and games, it was written from the heart, for the heart. Thank you. -Bob Stewart.

AUTHOR'S BIO:

BOB STEWART: Graduated from UNCSA in NC. His JESUS IN A BEEHIVE! (Pick of the Week by The New York Times) Performed Upstairs@ The Duplex and @Philly's Gay & Lesbian Theater Festival. His A MEMORY PLAY: performed @NYC's WorkShop Theater Co.'s Main Stage Season and it was chosen as "Best of the Fest" by The Mid-Town International Theater Festival. His AMERICAN INHERITANCE as a finalist for the Kennedy Center's Fund For New American Plays & an Industry Reading w/Tom Wopat and Angelica Page. (Optioned by Tony Winning Producer, Michael Rubenstein) His CHICKEN & EGG SOUP: Performed in NJ, GA, KY, RI, and even as a Radio Play in WA. His FABULOUS DARSHAN: "One of The Top Plays of the Year" by Indie Theatre Now, and was used as a Fundraiser (with the original NY cast) for The Schenectady Light Opera Company's Rainbow Access Program in Schenectady, NY, and recently in The Celebration Theatre's Reading Series in L.A. starring Co-Artistic Director-Michael A. Sheppard. He just completed ALL YOU CAN EAT, (A sequel to A MEMORY PLAY.) Also worked with one of the Woodstock Concert creators on a musical book based on the 1969 Woodstock Concert called THE UNTITLED 1969 MUSICAL PROJECT with co-writer, journalist Jeff Zelmanski. Currently working on a new comedy inspired by his late friend called CAROL OF CARROLL GARDENS which was chosen for BROADWAYCON's

READING SERIES, The Clamour Theatre's Writer's Retreat in FLA, THE DEPOT FOR NEW PLAY series in CT, an Industry Reading with Tony-Winner Karen Ziemba in 2019 and as a Zoom Reading with the Clamour Theatre again in Aug 2020. Just finished an epic-theater piece with co-writer Jeff Zelmanski called NEW YORK STORIES FROM MY UNCLE ELLIOTT! IMMORAL, ILLICIT, ILLEGAL, about searching for our "Queer DNA," by using the history of homosexual men from of the past 120 years in New York City. www.emaproduction.net